A Little Bach Problem

Author(s): Ernest Newman

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5ths when each alternate chord produces a complete 'tonal' chord :

alphabetically, Bach's design in the composition of the *Orgelbüchlein* is still unknown to most students. It has been only in the Edition of the Bachgesellschaft that the preludes have been printed in the order in which Bach himself had arranged them. Messrs. Novello are now about to issue an edition of the complete chorale preludes of Bach, in which those of the *Orgelbüchlein* are at last set forth in their proper order. The *Orgelbüchlein* is under the editorship of Mr. Ivor Atkins, who has done the student an additional service by accompanying it with a book of the original chorales upon which Bach has worked; for without a knowledge of these melodies a thorough understanding of the organ preludes is impossible. To this new edition I have had the pleasure of contributing a preface; and it is out of that preface that the present little problem arises.

Disregarding the chorales that are, as it were, subsidiary to the main scheme of the collection, that scheme may be set forth thus:

Advent	...	...	Chorales Nos. 1—4.
Christmas	...	...	" " 5—11, 13, 14.
New Year	...	...	" " 15, 16.
The Passion	...	...	" " 20—26.
Easter	...	...	" " 27—32.
Pentecost	...	...	" " 33.

It will be noticed that the Ascension finds no place in this arrangement, which is the one I have adopted in my preface. Mr. Atkins, however, in his edition of the original chorale melodies, has designated No. 32 as an Ascension chorale. This is the hymn, 'Heut triumphiret Gottes Sohn.' Much friendly correspondence has passed between Mr. Atkins and myself on the point; and as the result of it all we remain where we were at the beginning,—he in favour of the Ascension theory, I unable to decide positively either for Ascension or Easter, but feeling that the evidence points in the main to the latter.

It would be very gratifying if we could definitely assign 'Heut triumphiret Gottes Sohn' to Ascension, for then the scheme of illustrating the Church year from Advent to Pentecost would be complete. One is naturally predisposed to think that Bach desired this completeness. Nevertheless, after a good deal of research, I cannot see any good reason for taking the chorale out of the category of Easter hymns. The manuscript of the *Orgelbüchlein*, be it said, gives us no guidance whatever; it is, indeed, tantalisingly non-committal. The chorale immediately preceding 'Heut triumphiret'—No. 31, 'Erschienen ist der herrliche Tag'—is indubitably for Easter. The next chorale of which Bach has made an organ prelude,—No. 33, 'Komm, Gott Schöpfer, heiliger Geist'—is for Pentecost. Between Nos. 32 and 33, pages are left in the manuscript for four preludes that were never written. These are:

- (A.) 'Gen Himmel aufgefahen ist.'
- (B.) 'Nun freut euch, Gottes Kinder, all.'
- (C.) 'Komm, heiliger Geist, erfüll' die Herzen deiner Glaubigen.'
- (D.) 'Komm, heiliger Geist, Herre Gott.'

I am not sure what season (C) represents: it is a hymn that does not appear in any of the German chorale books I have been able to consult. It is tolerably certain, however, even from its first line, that it is a Pentecostal hymn, as (D) certainly is; while (A) and (B) are as certainly Ascension hymns. 'Heut triumphiret' thus comes between an indubitably Easter hymn and an indubitably Ascension hymn.

My own main reason for placing it in the Easter category is that I do not know of a single old hymn-

book in which it is not so placed; and I have examined a number of such books. Supplementary evidence as to its association with Easter is to be had in an English hymn-book of 1722—'Psalmody Germanica; or a Specimen of Divine Hymns, translated from the High Dutch, together with their proper tunes and thorough-bass.' The editor is John Christian Jacobi, who, in his dedication to 'Their Royal Highnesses Princess Anne, Princess Amalia, and Princess Carolina,' speaks of the volume as 'a translation of psalmody used in the native country of your Royal Highnesses.' Jacobi's order, of course, is that of the church year from Advent onwards; and the hymns he gives are virtually the same as those of the *Orgelbüchlein*, and in virtually the same order,—a proof of how fixed the associations of these hymns had been for more than one generation of Germans. He too places 'Heut triumphiret' among the Easter hymns.

To these considerations Mr. Atkins rejoins:

- (a.) That the words of 'Heut triumphiret' make it equally suitable for Easter or Ascension, and that there is evidence that it actually *was* used for the latter. For this he relies on a passage in Spitta (Eng. ed. II., 270), describing the special services at the big festivals during which services were held in both the Leipsic churches—St. Thomas's and St. Nicholas's. 'The hymns specially appointed,' says Spitta, 'were, for the New Year and Epiphany, "Puer natus in Bethlehem"; for Ascension, "Heut triumphiret Gottes Sohn"; for Trinity, "Spiritus sancti gratia."'

Against this argument I would urge:

That from the preceding page of Spitta it is clear that 'Heut triumphiret' was the hymn appointed for *Easter* during the 'three great festivals' observed on 'the Holy days.' There is nothing, then, in the passage on page 270 to indicate that Bach would be more likely to associate the hymn with Ascension than with Easter; and if the passages on pages 269 and 270 thus balance each other, we must fall back on our knowledge that the overwhelming weight of evidence from every other source is in favour of Easter.

Moreover, Spitta is describing simply the ordinances for the *Leipsic* churches—the ordinances with which Bach had to comply when he became cantor of St. Thomas's in 1723. But it is agreed that the *Orgelbüchlein* was written during his residence in Weimar (1708-1717), and copied out in Cöthen (1717-1723). As Germany was then made up of a number of independent States, the presumption is that Bach knew nothing of the ordinances for *Saxony* until he settled in Leipsic. What evidence is there that he knew of these ordinances while living in Weimar ten years or more before 1723, and that he was so impressed by the solitary fact that on one occasion 'Heut triumphiret' was used as an Ascension hymn in *Leipsic* as to disregard the universal German view that the hymn was typical of Easter? I am not asserting anything one way or the other; I am merely asking for evidence.

- (b.) Mr. Atkins points out that in the autograph of the *Orgelbüchlein* that once belonged to Mendelssohn, the order of the chorales is slightly different from that we are now familiar with. Spitta shows that this autograph must have been written in Weimar, and is older than the Cöthen version we now rely upon. In the

Mendelssohn copy the order of the chorales at the point we are now considering is this :

1. 'Christ lag in Todesbanden.'
2. 'Jesus Christus, unser Heiland.'
3. 'Christ ist erstanden.'
4. 'Erstanden ist der heilige Christ.'
5. 'Heut triumphiret Gottes Sohn.'
6. 'Erschienen ist der herrliche Tag.'

Now the *Easter* associations of Nos. 1 to 4 and No. 6 are beyond dispute; and I should say that the fact that Bach inserts 'Heut triumphiret' between them is proof conclusive that at Weimar, at any rate, it was for him an *Easter* chorale. But in the Cöthen revision the order is this :

1. 'Christ lag in Todesbanden.'
2. 'Jesus Christus, unser Heiland.'
3. 'Christ ist erstanden.'
4. 'Erstanden ist der heilige Christ.'
5. 'Erschienen ist der herrliche Tag.'
6. 'Heut triumphiret Gottes Sohn,'—

followed by the (uncomposed) Ascension Hymn 'Gen Himmel aufgefahen ist.' Mr. Atkins holds that by transposing the positions of Nos. 5 and 6, Bach meant to remove 'Heut triumphiret' from the *Easter* category and place it in that of Ascension. At best this can be no more than an assumption; but even as an assumption it is weakened, if not invalidated, by the fact that at the same time *Bach made other transpositions that cannot have the slightest ecclesiastical significance*. In the Mendelssohn autograph the *Passion* chorales, for example, are in this order :

1. 'Christe, du Lamm Gottes.'
2. 'O Lamm Gottes unschuldig.'
3. 'Da Jesus an dem Kreuze stund.'
4. 'O Mensch, bewein' dein' Sünde gross.'
5. 'Christus, der uns selig macht.'
6. 'Wir danken dir, Herr Jesu Christ.'
7. 'Hilf, Gott, dass mir's gelinge.'

In the Cöthen revision the same chorales appear in the following order:—2, 1, 5, 3, 4, 6, 7. If, then, Bach could alter the arrangement of this group for some reason of his own, quite unconnected with any change in his view of the *associations* of the hymns, why could he not alter the arrangement of the *Easter* hymns for the same simple reason? If it be contended that the rearrangement of the latter group was dictated by an ecclesiastical motive that was not present in the rearrangement of the former group, what is the evidence?

So far, while not denying that Mr. Atkins's view deserves serious consideration, if only for the reason that if we could adopt it it would give to the arrangement of the *Orgelbüchlein* a symmetry that is at present lacking, I can only say that in my opinion no case has been made out for the adoption of that view. Mr. Atkins, however, brings forward another point. In 1620 Gregor Ritsch (1584-1643) published at Leipsic a volume entitled 'Des Herrn Christi Triumph in seiner Himmelfahrt' (Christ's Triumph in His Ascension). In this volume was a hymn with the first line 'Heut triumphiret Gottes Sohn,'—the other lines, I gather, differing from those of the hymn that was in general use. Mr. Atkins apparently thinks that it may have been this hymn of Ritsch's that Bach had in his mind when planning the *Orgelbüchlein*. Again I ask, What is the evidence? It is clear from the Mendelssohn autograph that at first he included 'Heut triumphiret'

among the *Easter* chorales. Did he meet later with the hymn in Ritsch's collection, and straightway resolve to regard 'Heut triumphiret' as an Ascension hymn? If so, once more, What is the evidence?

I have tried to state Mr. Atkins's case as fairly as my own; but if I have not done it complete justice no doubt he will correct me. Both of us will welcome any light that any one else can throw on the matter. In conclusion let me say that if I can be proved to be wrong no one will be more delighted than myself, for I should like to be able to believe that Bach had rounded off his scheme in the way that Mr. Atkins thinks probable.

Occasional Notes.

NEW LIGHT ON BACH. We take the following from the programme of an organ recital recently given by Mr. Herbert Hodge :

Choral Prelude, 'We all believe in God' ... *Bach*

Known as 'The Giant Fugue,' by reason of the constantly recurring figure in the pedal part, which is supposed to represent a giant ascending the stairs, and who, having arrived at the top, tumbles and bumps his way down to the bottom again every time.

We have long felt that if Bach had a 'programme' in his mind when writing this well-known Prelude, it could hardly have been, as is generally supposed, that of signifying faith and confidence by the use of a ground bass. It is much more likely that he would endeavour to set forth the underlying idea of the great Catechism hymn by depicting 'such a getting upstairs'—and down again—as Mr. Hodge suggests. It would appear from Mr. Hodge's note that, thanks to Parry, Pirro, and Schweitzer, the choral preludes are taken much too seriously. Perhaps Mr. Hodge will put things right by telling us some more of the amusing events which these works are 'supposed' to depict.

William Sterndale Bennett was born at Sheffield on April 13, 1816. We propose to notice this centenary in our next number. In our issues for May, June, and August, 1903, there was an ample review of his career, and two portraits were given. We hear that a special performance of 'The Woman of Samaria' will be given in Sheffield Cathedral on April 14, under Dr. Henry Coward.

The Petrograd papers contain an announcement which makes one's mouth water and at the same time recalls many pleasant memories. At a performance in aid of a war charity at the Marinsky Theatre, M. Fokine was going to produce two new ballets. One was a stage version of 'Francesca da Rimini,' with Tchaikovsky's music, and the other was a *Scène de ballet* to the music of Glinka's 'Jota Aragonese.' In the first Madame Tchessinska was to take the principal part, and the names of most of the other dancers are familiar to London opera-goers. The conductor was to be Mr. Albert Coates.

It is not altogether pleasant to make the admission, but there are things for which one cannot help admiring the enemy. His willingness to spend money on art is one of them. The town of Karlsruhe, for instance, has just built itself a new concert hall, and the German Press asks whether in any other country a town of about 180,000 inhabitants could have the inclination, the energy, or the money to initiate and carry out such a scheme in the second year of a great war? That the Germans have some justification for congratulating themselves cannot be denied.